

The Parables:

According to the Greek and Hebrew definitions, a parable is "a placing of one thing beside another, an earthly story with a heavenly meaning, sentences with ethical wisdom and a comparison of one thing to another." God uses parables to teach those who are truly interested in following after Him. It is my prayer that you will be blessed by these truths.

The Sinner

By Mary Kane

Where do you like to go to pray? I posted this question on my Facebook page a few days ago and an overwhelming majority named an outside place or a window with a beautiful view as their preferred place of prayer. For some reason, people feel closer to God when they pray amidst His creation. I prefer to pray outside as well. Since I have a hard time sitting still for long stretches of time, I pray while I walk. Jesus also loved to pray outside; the mountains were His favorite retreat. According to Scripture, Jesus would arise early in the morning and walk to the wilderness to meet with His Father.

The Jews of long ago also had a favorite place to pray—the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus used the temple as a backdrop for a parable concerning the prayers of a Pharisee and a tax collector. As you will see, when it comes to prayer, as far as Jesus is concerned it's all about the heart.

Before we study this parable, please take a moment to pray and ask God to forgive you of any sin that He brings to mind and to open the eyes of your heart to hear the truth of His Holy Word. Now, please read Luke 18:9-14.

Jesus spoke this parable to whom in particular?

Jesus directed this parable at those who mistakenly trusted in their own righteousness and despised others. The word *despised* used in this verse

means to reject or cast aside, to treat someone as if they were “naught”; a big zero. When we depend on our own righteousness to earn our way to heaven, we will end up comparing ourselves to others. In this process, someone will end up being despised; either those whom we view as less deserving or ourselves, when we discover that we do not measure up to the righteousness of our friends or neighbors. Have you ever been despised by another? I know I have and it was a very painful experience. Worse yet, I have also despised other people. In God’s kingdom every person is valuable—period. Isn’t it wonderful that God sees us not as what we have been but as what He can make us become?

Please read Isaiah 64:6 and record what the Bible says about our own righteousness.

When I dust my furniture or clean my house, I always start with a clean towel. How silly it would be to try to wipe off my kitchen table with a filthy rag. Our own righteousness is like a “filthy rag”; it is incapable of wiping clean the sins on my heart. I believe that Jesus wanted the Pharisee to see the futility of trying to earn his way to heaven by works so he would repent and be saved. Maybe some people have consistently made better choices and decisions than I have; therefore they believe that they can trust in their own righteousness. I, however, do not suffer from this delusion. I know my own track record. My own righteousness is like a filthy rag.

Who went up to the temple to pray that day?

Pharisees were members of a very strict sect of Judaism who prided themselves on their ability to keep the Law. Respected and revered by most people, the Pharisees were on the top of the ladder of Hebrew

society. Tax collectors, however, were at the very bottom of the social ladder. They were ranked among the worst of sinners along with prostitutes, murders and thieves. "The tax collectors were as a class, detested not only by the Jews, but by other nations also, both on account of their employment and of the harshness, greed, and deception, with which they did their job."ⁱⁱ

We may think it odd that the Pharisee and the tax collector had to go to the temple to pray, but at that point in history the temple was the only medium of worship to which the people had access. Devout Jews went to the temple at specific hours to pray.

"In the days of Christ it [specific hours of prayer] had evidently become an institution. But ages before that, stated hours of prayer were known and religiously observed by all devout Jews. It evidently belonged to the evolutionary process of Jewish worship, in connection with the temple-ritual. Devout Jews, living at Jerusalem, went to the temple to pray. The pious Jews of the Diaspora opened their windows 'toward Jerus' and prayed "toward" the place of God's presence. The regular hours of prayer, as we may infer from Ps 55:17 and Da 6:10, were three in number. The first coincided with the morning sacrifice, at the 3rd hour of the morning, at 9 AM therefore. The second was at the 6th hour, or at noon, and may have coincided with the thanksgiving for the chief meal of the day, a religious custom apparently universally observed. The 3rd hour of prayer coincided with the evening sacrifice, at the ninth hour. Thus every day, as belonging to God, was religiously subdivided, and regular seasons of prayer were assigned to the devout believer."ⁱⁱⁱ

The time the Pharisee and the tax collector went to the temple did not seem to be one of the usual hours of Jewish prayer. They both went freely on their own time; one to reflect on his own righteous, the other to seek mercy for his sinfulness.

If you already had your prayer time today please make a list of prayer requests you brought before God:

Read verses 11-12 again and record all the details that you notice concerning the Pharisee's prayer.

- 1. His position.** He did not humble himself in word or in position. In his own assumed righteousness, he boldly came and stood before the throne of God.
- 2. His prayer.** It seems as if the Pharisee wasn't praying to God as much as he was having a conversation with himself. The NKJV reads, "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself..."
- 3. His petitions.** Notice that the Pharisee did not actually ask God to provide for a single need— physical, spiritual or otherwise. He conversed with himself about all of his good deeds. He commented on his clean record, his tithing, his fasting and how he was better than other men. As mentioned by Jesus in verse 9, the Pharisee trusted completely in his own righteousness.
- 4. His problem.** The Pharisee does not confess any sin, spend any time in adoration or worship of God or pray for the needs of any other person. The problem with the Pharisee's prayer was that it wasn't a prayer.
- 5. His priority.** Even while in the Presence of God, the Pharisee was completely absorbed in himself. A religion unto himself, the Pharisee had no need of a Savior to deliver him from his sins or a Father to supply his daily needs of mercy and grace.

When we don't see ourselves as who we really are, sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God, we will begin to despise others and think they are less worthy than we are. It is strange the Pharisees struggled

so with self-righteousness. More than any other group of people, the Pharisees would have been very familiar with Isaiah 64:6 and Psalm 14:2-3. Both of these Scriptures deal with the depravity and unrighteousness of man apart from the saving grace of God. Like I have been and you have been, the Pharisees were deceived by their own hearts.

The phrase "I thank you that I am not like other men..." caught my eye. The Pharisee of this parable believed that he was superhuman...that he did not suffer from the same terminal sin problem as every other member of the human race. Jesus, on the other hand placed the Pharisee and the tax collector on the same plane at the beginning of verse 10, where he described them both as "two men"... two men with a sin problem...two men in need of the Savior.

Now, please read verse 13 again.

Please describe the attitude and behavior of the tax collector.

He was humble and sorrowful. The tax collector in the parable did not suffer from any delusions of his righteousness; he would have read it in the eyes of his countrymen every time they shunned him on the streets of Jerusalem.

I found something interesting hidden away in the original Greek language that I had missed when reading verse 13 in English. In the NKJV, verse 13 reads:

"And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as *raise his eyes* to heaven..." (emphasis mine).

In the original Greek, the word *raise* means "to lift up, to be lifted up with *pride*, to *exalt one's self*" (emphasis mine). In comparison to the Pharisee who just spent the last few minutes in the temple "exalting" his entire being before God, the tax collector would not "exalt" even an eye to heaven.

Verse 13 also states that the tax collector “beat his breast”; an action used by mourners in eastern cultures. Unlike the Pharisee, the tax collector went to the temple to mourn over his sin and ask the Father for mercy. In asking for God to be merciful to him, the tax collector is appealing to God by faith to make propitiation (atonement by sacrifice) for his sin and count it unto him for righteousness.

Let’s take a moment to summarize what we’ve learned about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Within this parable, I see many contrasts. I started a chart below comparing these two men; please fill in the missing pieces.

Pharisee	Tax Collector
	Stood afar
Prideful	
Self-righteous	
	Mourns over sin
Prays about his good points	
	Hated by all

Now please read Matthew 6:5-6 and record other “pharisaical” tendencies we should avoid when praying:

How should we pray according to Matthew 6:9-13?

Now please return to Luke 18.

According to verse 14, which man left the temple justified and forgiven?

What will happen to us if we refuse to humble ourselves before the Lord?

God, in His great mercy will not leave us in our pride; He will humble us.

What will happen if we humble ourselves before the Lord?

When we humble ourselves before the Lord, He will raise us to "dignity, honor and happiness."^{iv}

From what you have you learned today from this study?

What does God want you to do with what you have learned?

In closing, from the world's point of view, these two men came from opposite ends of the social strata; one respected, one despised. I believe that by choosing these two types of people as examples, God was announcing that all have sinned and that all, from Pharisees to tax collectors, are welcomed by the blood of Christ to enter into His kingdom.

*“For God so loved the world that
He gave His only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him should not perish
but have everlasting life.” John 3:16*

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ⁱ Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *parabolē* (Strong's 3850)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2010. 16 Aug 2010. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G3850&t=KJV> >

ⁱⁱ Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *telōnēs* (Strong's 5057)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2011. 21 Jun 2011. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G5057&t=KJV> >

ⁱⁱⁱ Dosker, Henry E. "Hours of Prayer", *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*. Edited by James Orr. Blue Letter Bible. 1913. 5 May 2003 24 Jun 2011. <<http://www.blueletterbible.org/search/Dictionary/viewTopic.cfm?type=GetTopic&Topic=Hours+of+Prayer&DictList=4#ISBE>>

^{iv} Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for *hypsoō* (Strong's 5312)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2011. 24 Jun 2011. < <http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G5312&t=KJV> >